

The Bible, the Spirit of Prophecy and the Church

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CHAPTER 14

CONTEMPORARY PROPHETIC MINISTRY IN AFRICA: IMPLICATIONS FOR THE ADVENTIST CHURCH AND THE MINISTRY OF ELLEN G. WHITE

Sampson M. Nwaomah

The biblical gift of prophecy provided to enhance divine-human communication is perhaps one of the gifts of the Spirit that was most prominent in the Scriptures.¹ According to G. I. Archer, Jr., a significance of the prophetic office was “to maintain the integrity of the covenant relationship in the heart of Israel.”² It has also been observed that the prophets were “messengers in the highest sphere of human interest, viz, religion.”³ To the Seventh-day Adventist Church, the notable manifestation of this gift was in the ministry of Ellen G. White, whose prophetic ministry was from 1844-1915.⁴ During her ministry, she demonstrated the characteristics of biblical prophets and also fulfilled certain functions ascribed to these prophets. The *Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual* states: “Her writings are a continuing and authoritative source of truth which provide for the church comfort, guidance, instruction, and correction. They also make clear that the Bible is the standard by which all teaching and experience must be tested.”⁵ Thus she is held in high esteem by the church; her writings, which document most of her prophetic ministry could be said to influence the theology, mission, and lifestyle of most Adventists.⁶

In contemporary African Christianity, the prophetic gift has also become a spiritual gift claimed by some who hold spiritual leadership in certain circles. The claims to prophetic ministry in Africa are numerous. There are individuals who either bear the title “prophet/ess”⁷ or assert this identity by utterances or predictions, which sometimes meet fulfillment. Every year, some self-acclaimed prophets publish what they call “prophecies for the year.” These are usually given at the dawn of the New Year. They are announced during religious services and either published on the Internet or national dailies.⁸ The genuineness of some of these prophecies has been questioned.⁹ Thus, the gift of prophecy in Christianity in Africa has been a subject of immense controversy. This development has sometimes created uncertainties and misunderstandings in the minds of some Adventists who question the continuous relevance of the prophetic role of E. G. White or embrace current claims in addition to the

ministry of E. G. White, thus leading to wrong perceptions of her ministry. Because the abundance of claims to the prophetic ministry in Africa and misunderstanding of her prophetic role seem to have left some Adventists today questioning the contemporary relevance of the ministry of E. G. White, this paper therefore surveys biblical prophetic ministry, reviews the history of claims to prophetic ministry in Africa and examines contemporary claims to this ministry on the continent. It concludes by identifying some challenges the current prophetic situation on the continent has for the church and the ministry of E. G. White.

Survey of Biblical Prophetic Gift and Ministry

Nature of Prophetic Gift and Ministry

A prophet has been defined as a “person supernaturally called and qualified as a spokesman/woman for God.”¹⁰ A prophet then is an authorized spokesperson of God. According to Walter C. Kaiser, Jr, perhaps, the significance of the biblical prophetic movement could be illustrated by the occurrence of the word “prophet over 300 times in the Old Testament and about 125 times in the New Testament. The term “prophetess” appears six times in the Old Testament and two times in the New Testament.”¹¹ However, Ekkehardt Mueller identifies 144 occurrences of the term “prophet” in the New Testament.¹² We may then conclude that the frequent occurrences of these terms in both Testaments signify the importance of the gift of prophecy and the ministry of those called to the prophetic office in the life of the community of God’s people and even unbelievers.

In the Old Testament prophets were designated by a number of titles, such as God’s servants (Hebrew *‘ebed*) and “man of God (Heb. *‘ish ha elohim*). As servants of God, they were to accomplish the task given to them. The title man of God may have been used to describe the close relationship they had with God (Deut 33:1; Josh 14:6; 1 Sam 9:6-10; 1 Kgs 17:18, 24; 2 Kgs 1:6-13). God could enable a prophet to see realities that were invisible to ordinary eyes (Num 22:31; 2 Kgs 6:15-15). And this could be through visions and dreams (Num 12:6). In the OT, a prophet (or seer) was one inspired by God through the Holy Spirit to deliver a message for a specific purpose(s). God did not call an individual as a prophet/ess for personal edification or advancement or enhance his or her ego. Prophetic calls and offices were primarily for the glory of God and to persuade people to continued allegiance and worship of the true God.

Gorge Fohrer has suggested that the Hebrew religion experienced two types of prophecy (seer and *nabi*), corresponding to two types of religious background (nomadic and settled). The seers communicated divine instructions primarily through dreams and premonitions.¹³ Fohrer further contends that the

function of the seer was sometimes like that of the magician, priest, and clan leader and was believed to be inspired by God through vision.¹⁴ The second type of prophetic ministry was that of the *nabi*, who was more ecstatic in nature; ministering in the sanctuary and royal courts.¹⁵ Jewish prophecy may have reached its climax in the 8th century B.C., in the ministry of prophets like Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Amos, and Hosea.¹⁶ The functions of the gift of prophecy in the OT are numerous. They include, but are not limited to, (1) providing wise counsel (1 Sam 22:5), (2) encouraging God's people (1 Kgs 19: 14-18), (3) recognizing evil (Exod 32:7-8, 26-28; cf. Acts 5:1-11) and (4) giving correction and admonition (Jer. 1:10). Others are (5) provoking social and religious reforms (Ezek 33:1-11; Mic 6:8), (6) predicting and speaking of the signs of the times (Dan 2, 7, 9), and (7) announcing of judgment or impending danger to both Israel and the heathen nations (Isa 13-12, Jer 46-51, Ezek 25-32; Amos 3:7-8; Gen 18:17-18; cf. Acts 11: 27-28).¹⁷

In the New Testament, prophecy¹⁸ is listed as one of the gifts of the Spirit to the church (Rom 12:6-8; 1 Cor 12:8-11, 28-30; 13:1-2) and the list of ministries in Ephesians 4:11. While the nature of prophecy in 1 Corinthians 12:10 may slightly differ from that discussed in the 1 Corinthians 14,¹⁹ it seems that generally, the focus of prophecy is on three major areas of the life of believers. From Paul's epistle to the Corinthians (1 Cor 14: 3, 4), these areas may be identified as (1) edification, (2) exhortation and (3) comfort. Thus, the gift of prophecy encompasses speaking forth an inspiring message from God for the salvation experience of believers. There seems to be a difference between the gift of prophecy and prophesying. While prophesying is the function of a prophet, not everyone who prophesied was a prophet.²⁰ Scriptures reveal that some who prophesied were judges, leaders, or priests. They included men like Gideon, David, Aaron, Miriam, Eldad, Medad, the seventy elders, Balaam (Num 21-24), Deborah, and Manoah and his wife.²¹ God at various times communicated his will through certain individuals and even animals (Num 22:21-25; John 11:51).²²

According to Augustine Deke, prophecy operates in three dimensions: (1) audible voice, (2) dreams and visions, and (3) the gift of prophecy. Deke identifies these three dimensions as the "gift of knowledge."²³ In the sphere of the audible voice, he makes reference to Samuel (1 Sam 3: 11-14; cf. Exod 19:3-24 and 1 Kgs 19:9-18),²⁴ to whom God spoke audibly in the house of Eli. Dreams or visions as a medium of communication from God are evident in the life of most of the Hebrew prophets, such as Daniel (Dan 2:19), Joel (Joel 2:28-29), and Zechariah (Zech 1:8-11), who principally received God's message through visions and dreams. The third dimension of communication is the gift of prophecy.²⁵ This gift reveals the secrets of men's hearts (1 Sam 9: 19; 2 Kgs 5:20-26; John 4:7-30; John 2:24-25 and 1 Cor 14:24-25). Thus, the prophetic gift had

a great influence among God's people in biblical times and the voice of the prophets and their ministries played significant roles among God's people.

Kaiser identifies another dimension of communication between God and the prophets. He states:

More frequently, the prophet received a direct message from God with no audible voice. Instead, there must have been an internal voice by which the consciousness of the prophet suddenly was so heightened that he knew beyond a shadow of a doubt that what he said or what he was to do was exactly what God wanted done in that situation (1 Kings 13:20-22; cf. Zech 1:8-11).²⁶

The other dimension Kaiser identifies, similar to Deke's "gift of prophecy," is the opening of the prophet's eyes so that he can see realities that to ordinary persons would be hidden. He did this to prophet Elisha's servant so that he could see that the angelic armies of the Lord that surrounded Samaria were far greater than the Syrian armies (2 Kgs 6:15-17).²⁷ It seems, however, that the preferred and most prominent mediums of communication were dreams and visions. God himself, in rebuking Aaron and Miriam who had coveted the prophetic ministry of Moses, indicated that He speaks to his prophets through dreams and visions (Num 12:6).

Duration of the Prophetic Gift

Prophetic studies continue to witness the debate on the continuity of the gift of prophecy. Essentially, two categories of argument exist. One believes the gift has ceased. The other upholds the existence of this gift in the church until the coming of Christ. On the continuity of the prophetic gift, Michael Griffiths argues: "Prophecy is the most commonly referred to of all the gifts. It comes in no less than seven lists. . . . The gift will be common among Christians, fulfilling the hopes of the Old Testament that 'all God's people should prophesy' (Num 11:29)."²⁸ On the other hand, F. David Farnell and R. Thomas, cited by Mueller, argue for the cessation of the gift of prophecy. But Mueller, evaluating their arguments, concludes that the gift is still relevant until the coming of Christ. Mueller contends that the prophetic gift is still relevant today because: (1) spiritual gifts are essential for the appropriate functioning of the body; (2) Scripture does not support the teaching on cessation of prophetic gifts; (3) spiritual gifts, one of which is the gift of prophecy, build up the church and contribute to unity of the church; (4) Joel's prophecy in Joel 2:28-31 speaks of the revival of the gift of prophecy; and (5) Jesus' prediction of the rise of false prophets presupposes the continuity of the gift of prophecy and the existence of genuine prophets.²⁹ It may be concluded that as long as the church exists on

earth, in his wisdom, God may identify some people and endow them with the gift of prophecy, consistent with His word and revelation, in the salvation experience, of God's people, and ministry to unbelievers, who may be encouraged to allegiance. Thus, it might be challenging to argue that the gift of prophecy has ceased since God's mission of salvation of humanity is not concluded.

Prophetic Ministry in Africa

The claims to prophetic ministry in Africa have a long history and are represented largely in the sub-Sahara regions of the continent. Matthew Kustenbauder observes that in Eastern Africa the history of prophetic movements and cults dates back to the earliest period of colonial administration and missionary endeavor.³⁰ These movements had links with indigenous or "traditional" deities and spirits, Christianity, and even Islam.³¹ The motivation for these prophetic claims also ranged from efforts to overcome drought, famine, and other natural disasters and even served as resistance movements against European occupation. In addition to political aims, it is argued that most of these movements intended to purify Christian and Muslim religious institutions, thereby, ultimately, reforming and cleansing the whole of society.³² They were however, often viewed as primitive manifestations of heathen superstition, opposed to societal order and thus needing to be extinguished.³³

The historical sequence of prophetic movements in Eastern Africa could be traced from the earliest movements led by the prophets of the Nuer and Dinka peoples of southern Sudan, the Maji Maji rebellion against the Germans in response to a repressive policy of forced labor and cotton planting in southern Tanganyika (modern Tanzania) in 1905-1907, to the Yakan cult among the Lugbara of northwestern Uganda, led by prophet, Rembe (d. 1919). All these prophets were believed to have possessed divinely given knowledge and mystical power, and could predict the future.³⁴ They thus had a large following among the people.

Twentieth-century Eastern Africa has also witnessed claims to prophetic manifestations. These also have been linked to the arrival of Christianity in Africa, because leaders of these movements have either been seen as messengers of indigenous divinities, who were sent to oppose Christianity, or have been African Christians attempting to purify and Africanize Christianity, which was introduced and regimented by European missionaries.³⁵

Modern prophetic movements in Eastern Africa can be found among the Gikuyu of central Kenya, in Harry Thuku's Young Kikuyu Association in the early 1920s, and the establishment of the African Independent Pentecostal Church, linked to the Kikuyu Independent Schools Association. Also there was a controversy surrounding clitoridectomy of girls, which led to the movement

Watu wa Mungu (“People of God”), by Gikuyu seers who refused European clothing and objects, and who worshiped facing Mount Kenya, which is assumed to be the dwelling place of the traditional Gikuyu High God. We may also mention some other prophetic movements in Kenya, such as Mumbo, among the Gusii of western Kenya; the Dini ya Msambwa (“Religion of the Ancestor”) among the Luhya of western Kenya, founded by Elijah Masinde (d. 1987), a former Quaker mission convert, from the Bukusu subgroup of the Luhya; and the Dini ya Msambwa in the 1950s among the Pokot, north of the Luhya. Lastly was the ministry of a Catholic lay member, Simeo Ondeto (1920-1991), who is called *hono* (“the man who can do miracles”). His followers “believed that he could prophesy, cure the sick, raise the dead, make the blind see and the crippled walk, and cast out evil spirits. He was said to know what was happening in other places and to know what was in a person’s heart. Eventually, multitudes came to believe that their prophetic leader was, in fact, “Jesus Christ reincarnated in African skin and come to save them from their suffering.”³⁶

In contemporary Kenya, one person, whose prophetic claim is respected by many and has considerable following, is Dr. David Edward Owuor. Dr. Owuor holds a PhD in Molecular Genetics from the University of Haifa, Israel. In 2003 he abandoned his career for an international prophetic office. He claims to have a “specific mandate from the Lord Jesus Christ to prepare His people for His soon coming.”³⁷ Today, Dr. Owuor runs periodic public religious meetings, attracting followers from all over the country and beyond. People flock to him, claiming to seek divine intervention through miracles or prophetic utterances about their situation.

The evidence of claims for the prophetic office in Western Africa is traced to around the 1920s, with Ghana and Nigeria leading.³⁸ In Ghana, this may be dated to former Methodist catechist and schoolteacher, Joseph William Egyanka Appiah (1893-1948), who later became known to his followers as Prophet Jemisimiham Jehu-Appiah. He founded the Musama Disco Christo Church (MDCC) in 1919 as a prayer fellowship within one of the mission churches, the Methodist Church of the Central Region of Ghana. He and his followers were later expelled from the Methodist Church in 1922, accused of occult practices of prophesying, healing, and speaking in tongues. He claimed angelic visits and revelations and was told by three angels that he would be a king.³⁹ Another early prophetic movement of significance in Ghana and Côte d’Ivoire was that founded by William Wadé Harris (1865-1929), regarded as the father of Christianity in Côte d’Ivoire.⁴⁰

In Nigeria, the Aladura movement emerged in 1918. In that year, Joseph Shadare (d. 1962) organized an Anglican prayer group at Ijebu-Ode in Southwestern Nigeria, to provide support and healing for victims of the influenza epidemic.⁴¹ The group was comprised largely of members of the younger Christian elite, who called themselves the Precious Stone Society.

Disgruntled with Western religious forms and lack of spiritual power, they were strongly influenced by the divine healing literature of the fundamentalist Faith Tabernacle Church based in Philadelphia, USA. Although some of its first members had prophetic visions, the group's main activities centered on faith healing, prayer protection, and observing a strict moral code.⁴²

Other influential early prophetic movement leaders were Joseph Ayodele Babalola (1906–1959), who established the Christ Apostolic Church, and Josiah Olunowo Ositelu (d. 1966), an Anglican catechist and schoolteacher, who established the Church of the Lord (Aladura), in 1925. Since the 1970s, there has been a great proliferation of new prophetic movements among Evangelicals or Protestants. This has given rise to prayer houses and even multi-million dollar mega-churches.⁴³ Many of these preach a gospel of spiritual and material prosperity and attempt to address the existential level of their followers. They promise an encounter with God, in which they claim healing from sickness and deliverance from evil. In this category, one may mention Prophet Temitope B. Joshua. According to James N. Amanze, T. B. Joshua's success in ministry and the rapid growth of his church (the Synagogue Church of All Nations, SCOAN), is due to his "success in healing and ability to 'accurately' predict future events."⁴⁴ Amanze claims that Joshua's prophetic ministry is akin to the 9th Century B.C type of Biblical prophets, which consisted of the "combination of magical performances and the ability to 'predict' accurately what was going on in the political, social, religious and economic systems of the time."⁴⁵

A significant prophetic movement in Central Africa is *Eglise de Jesus Christ sur la terre par le prophète Simon Kimbangu* (EJCSK), founded by Simon Kimbangu (circa 1890-12 October 1951), who was acclaimed as "one of the great African prophets, . . . who inspired a mass-movement toward Christianity."⁴⁶ Miracles, including the raising of the dead are said to have attended his ministry. It is said he opposed idolatry, affirmed God, and was a social reformer.⁴⁷ There are no documented studies on the claims to prophetic ministry within the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Africa. However, it may not be concluded there are no claims to such manifestations.⁴⁸

We may conclude this this review by affirming that the prophetic movements in Africa are dominated by the African Initiated Churches (AICc), some of Pentecostal orientation, while others are syncretistic in nature. However, the common thread among these prophetic movements is the claim of fighting witchcraft and sorcery, which cause personal misfortunes and frustrate successes and are also responsible for societal and cultural confusion and disintegration. The prophetic movements also claim the ability to warn of possible imminent danger and tell how to avert such, reveal strategies for success, and function as social reformers and moralists. These tend to provide

them with some legitimacy and acceptance. These situations may also have emboldened some to lay claims to the prophetic ministry.

Legitimacy and Influencing Factors

The Scriptures provide certain signs by which a genuine prophet may be identified. Five of these signs of a biblical prophet are given in Deuteronomy 13:1-5 and Deuteronomy 18:15-22. Kaiser lists these signs as: (1) a prophet must be an Israelite, (2) he must speak in the name of the Lord, (3) he must be able to predict the near as well as the distant future, (4) he must be able to work signs and wonders, and (5) his words must conform to the previous revelation that God has given.⁴⁹ It would seem that none of these signs is independent of the others; they function as a unit. These signs may have collectively guided claims to and recognition of the prophetic ministry in “ancient Israel. Thus, someone who is failing in one aspect of ministry may not claim prophetic ministry.⁵⁰ Correspondingly, claims to the prophetic office in modern times call for conformity to the biblical certifying signs. The only exception, however, might be the sign of nationality. In modern times, one may argue that a prophet must come from the community of believers since Israel represented the movement of God’s people in biblical times.

However, it seems the history of the prophetic movements in Africa and their contemporary manifestations are deficient of some of the confirming signs. The thriving nature of the claims to the prophetic gift, office and the ministry of prophecy on the continent may then be linked more to the religious nature of Africans and their thirst and hunger of hearing from God, more than conformity to the biblical prophetic ministry. In this vein Deke observes:

People generally want to hear from God. The same applies to those who claim to speak on behalf of God. Generally, the 21st century African theology and ministry at large is searching for the voice of God. Africans enjoy prophecy. Any voice that confirms their misery or good fortunes is respected. . . . African people have been socialized into African traditional beliefs, which tend to encourage the spirit of leaving’ everything to the supernatural.⁵¹

Therefore, in their study of contemporary discernment of the legitimacy and factors that influence the acceptance of the ministry of self-acclaimed prophets in Africa, from the standpoint of Zimbabwe, Nyasha Madzokere and Francis Machingura identify seven influencing factors. These are (1) the call of the Prophet/ess, (2) ecstasy, (3) professionalism, (4) the criterion of miracles, (5) prediction and fulfillment, (6) blind nationalism versus realism and “morality and (7) teaching obedience to Yahweh.”⁵² Anderson also

follows this line of argument.⁵³ Consequently, many followers of the prophets in Zimbabwe, and indeed all over the continent, see the performance of miracles by the self-acclaimed prophets as evidencing their authenticity. Across Africa, it seems that the generally accepted criteria are miracles, prediction, and fulfillment. But miracles alone, as important as they may be in a Christian's experience, unquestionably are inadequate to substantiate prophetic ministry. Christ warns of end-time manifestations of rebellious prophetic ministry, complemented by miracles (Matt 7:22, 23; 24:24). Further, the ministry of Moses and Aaron in the Exodus indicate that it is the function of speaking for God rather than the miracles they performed before Pharaoh that gave credence to their prophetic identity.

Similarly, accomplishments of some predictions given by these self-acclaimed prophets give them credibility in some circles. However, as with the criterion of miracles, the Scriptures also caution about endorsing prophecy or prophetic ministry, principally on reliance on the fulfillment of prediction in Deuteronomy 13:1-5. God warns that prophets who attempt to lead people from true worship, irrespective of the fulfillment of their predictions/prophecy, lose their credibility. It might be that some of these prophets are speaking in the name of other gods, as God warns in Deuteronomy 18:20, even though some of their predictions are fulfilled. Therefore, more than anything else, an emphasis on obedience to God evidences the legitimacy of a prophet, although God may choose to reveal the future to a prophet and miracles may attend his/her ministry.

However, Allan Anderson further argues that African prophetic ministry is akin to biblical prophetic ministry. He argues this is evidenced in the manifestation of the presence of the Spirit, performance of miracles and healings, utilization of music and dancing, as with Elijah and Elisha (see 2 Kgs 3:15). Also the frequent use of symbolic ritual acts and symbols such as robes, staffs, ropes, beards, the demonstration of power, gender inclusiveness and provision of pastoral care by addressing practical needs of the people, a vacuum that most orthodox churches are unable to fill, give credence to the prophetic ministry in African Christianity.⁵⁴ It has also been observed that mystic seals, talismans, charms, magic necklaces, bangles, wristwatches, anointed pens, money-saving purses, energy belts, power rings, colored candles, magic mirrors, incense; rings for success, good luck oils, true love oils, life protection oils, good fortune sandals, exam success oils, attraction oils, good luck oils, money drawing oils, holy waters, beauty powders, Florida water, witch expellers and bath mixtures, olive oil, powder, perfumes and holy water are common in prophetic ministries in Africa.⁵⁵ Ritual bathing of a person by a professed prophet is also common.⁵⁶ Although the use of these objects centers on the African worldview of confrontation between humanity and the spirit world and the rituals to appease or conquer the spirits, it is believed that the use of these objects and

rituals by the prophets as mediums of prophetic functions and their appropriation by seekers assist in the realization of their desires.

Deke, however, contends there is a generous usage of the word prophecy or prophet in African traditional religion, which sometimes includes consulting spirit mediums.⁵⁷ Similarly, Joseph Quayesi-Amakye asserts “prophetism exists in African traditional religions, where it operates through mediums, priests, and diviners. Whereas priests/priestesses and mediums may provide information orally under spirit possession, diviners are able to foretell events by means of their divining skills and objects.”⁵⁸ Thus, Deke advances that the church in Africa is unable “to differentiate between true prophets and false prophets. It places much emphasis on the spoken word without evaluating the source.”⁵⁹ Consequently, the rapid evolution and acceptance of the prophetic churches in Africa could have opened the way for the numerous modes Africans communicate with God/deities/demons to be introduced into African theology. As Deke argues, “soothsaying, divination, sorcerers, fortune telling and spirit guides have been accepted and embraced in African theology under the banner of prophecy and faith healing.”⁶⁰

Implications for Adventist Church and the Ministry of Ellen G. White

The final section of this paper focuses on some implications that the prophetic ministries in Africa have for the Seventh-Adventist Church and the ministry of Ellen G. White. Although there is no documented impact of the services of the self-acclaimed prophets and prophetic ministries in Africa on Seventh-day Adventists, there are, however, experiences narrated by some Adventists who claim they have benefited from the ministries of these prophetic movements and prophets.⁶¹ The power manifestations that sometimes characterize the ministry of the “prophets” in Africa draw some awe from their admirers, which encourages people to place a lot of faith in the ministries of the self-acclaimed prophets and prophetesses. Further, it seems that the distant nature of the prophetic ministry of Ellen G. White, and perhaps a vacuum in Adventist theology and ministry, cause a weak response to immediate concerns of the Africans. These may have led some to seek answers from the prophetic movements and ministries in their locality who promise solutions. In addition, some argue that the nature of E. G. White and her communications does not seem to resonate with many Africans, whose phenomenological worldview yearns for immediate solutions, such as those promised by the many prophetic movements. Thus, certain experiences such as fear, pain, and aspirations may expose members to seek for solutions, sometimes in the wrong places, either due to ignorance or the failure of their immediate spiritual community to provide such an opportunity. The church, therefore, needs to endeavor to fill the

vacuum that may lead its members to desire and appropriate what could be possibly be allegiance to strange spirits in the guise of prophetic gifts and ministry. Rather than placing faith in the prophetic ministries that abound, members need to be encouraged to have absolute faith in God. Thus, the following implications are identified.

Emphasis on the Biblical Teaching and the Continuity of the Gift of Prophecy

As our discussion in earlier sections of these papers showed, the continuity of the biblical gift of prophecy is unquestionable. It is also on this foundation that the Adventist church upholds and promotes the relevance of the prophetic gift of E. G. White. Similarly, this continuity principle, as already stated, has been argued as a justification for modern prophetic movements in Africa, since it may be reasoned there is no geographic exclusion in the endowment of the gift of prophecy to the Christian community. However, it does appear that the emphasis on this continuity principle alone is insufficient to declare every manifestation of ecstasy and the utterances that follow as evidence of the presence of a genuine prophetic gift in any Christian community. This becomes important because ecstasy is also an experience evident in soothsaying, divination, sorcery, fortune telling, and spirit guidance that are part of African religions. While one may be limited in accurately judging prophetic experiences in African Christianity, there might be haste to accept and embrace these experiences in African Christianity. Therefore, while the church needs to continuously affirm the continuity of the prophetic ministry, the biblical criterion for prophetic gifts and ministry should be made evident, so that unsuspecting members can be protected from the prey of contemporary prophetic movements in Africa and their faith safeguarded.

The Role of the Ministry of Ellen G. White and Its Relationship with Scripture

A second implication considered in this study is the need to emphasize the unique role of the Spirit of Prophecy to the Seventh-day Adventists Church and its relationship to Scriptures. There are also indications that some of the dissatisfaction and even rejection of the Spirit of Prophecy by some Adventists in favor of, or in addition to, the prophetic movements on the continent arise from inadequate understandings, misguided and unbalanced presentations about the role of the gift of prophecy in the Adventist Church, as manifested in the life of Ellen G. White and her statements on certain issues.⁶² On the relationship between her ministry and the Scriptures, perhaps, she herself puts it clearly when she said: "The Spirit was not given—nor can it ever be

bestowed—to supersede the Bible; for the Scriptures explicitly state that the Word of God is the standard by which all teaching and experience must be tested.”⁶³ She also admonished, “The *Testimonies* are not to take the place of the Word. . . . Our position and faith is in the Bible. And never do we want any soul to bring in the Testimonies ahead of the Bible.”⁶⁴ These statements and similar ones⁶⁵ demonstrate her faith in the Scriptures and define her understanding of her ministry and the relationship between her writings and the Scriptures. Therefore, to affirm faith in her ministry, it is important that her writings be correctly understood and presented, as well as used appropriately in advancing some teachings and positions.

Availability and Comprehensibility of Ellen G. White Works

Another and final implication for the church could be making more available and comprehensible the writings of Ellen G. White. Currently, her writings can mostly be read in English. Making her writings readily available can be achieved if efforts are made to provide her writings in the languages many Adventists on the continent can read and understand. The Ellen G. White Estate may deepen the understanding of biblical prophetic gift, cultivate and sustain confidence in the prophetic gift and ministry of Ellen G. White, and enrich understanding and appreciation of her writings by vigorously pursuing the availability of her key books, such as *Steps to Christ* and the Conflict of the Ages Series, in some regional languages widely spoken in Africa. This is a project we believe is worth embarking on.⁶⁶

Conclusion

Biblical prophetic ministry is still relevant today. Hence, there have been claims to the possession of the gift of prophecy among African Christians. History and contemporary events reveal that these claims abound on the continent. Attraction to these movements and prophetic ministry stretch beyond the community of faith of those who profess to have the gift of prophecy. Seventh-day Adventists are not immune to this attraction. This, no doubt could be because of a limited understanding of the characteristics and functions of a true prophet among many Adventists in Africa, as well as a misunderstanding of the role of the ministry and writings of E. G. White to the church. Consequently, there is need for continued education concerning the characteristics and functions of the biblical prophetic gift and the unique role of Ellen White’s ministry and writings to the church. Where clear teachings about Ellen White are lacking, these factors could continue to attract the thriving, but misleading prophetic movements and ministries in Africa.

NOTES

- ¹ Hebrews 1:1 reveals that God spoke through the prophets to communicate His will to His people throughout the ages. Ephesians 4:11 indicates that this gift would manifest itself in the church throughout its earthly existence.
- ² Gleason I. Archer, Jr. *A Survey of the Old Testament Introduction* (Chicago, IL: Moody, 1974), 304.
- ³ E. Koing, "Hebrew Prophecy," *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics (ERE)*, ed. James Hastings (Edinburgh, Scotland: T & T Clarke, 1980), 10:384.
- ⁴ Ellen G. White played significant roles in the establishment of the Seventh-day Adventist Church; there was evident development in her theology from when she was given her first prophetic vision in 1844 until her death in 1915.
- ⁵ *The Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual*, 18th ed. (Silver Springs, MD: General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 2010), 162.
- ⁶ Ellen G. White wrote in the areas of theology, health, education, and relationships, among others.
- ⁷ Some churches in Africa have spiritual titles, such as prophets for certain category of leaders. I once examined a Master of Arts in Religion thesis written in a Nigerian University, where the spiritual gifts in Ephesians 4:11 (apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers) were treated as ecclesiastical offices into which people were yearly appointed. Thus, in the Christ Apostolic Church, people can be appointed to the office of prophet. Religious leaders such as Kenyan Dr. David Edward Owuor, Temitope B. Joshua of Nigeria, and the Zimbabwean big three, Walter Magaya, Uebert Angel, and Emmanuel Makandiwa, are called prophets.
- ⁸ See "Popular Lagos Prophet Releases Stunning 2016 Prophecies," accessed 2 February 2017, <https://www.naij.com/685496-former-present-minister-will-die-popular-lagos-prophet-releases-2016-prophecies.html>; "T.B Joshua Releases Alarming 2016 Predictions," *Premium Times*, January 1, 2016, accessed 2 February 2017, <http://www.premiumtimesng.com/letter-to-the-editor/196039-t-b-joshua-releases-alarming-2016-predictions.html>; "Pastor Adeboye of RCCG Makes 11 Prophecies for 2016," accessed 2 February 2017, <https://www.naij.com/683352-pastor-enoch-adeboye-issues-11-prophecies-2016.html>; "Malawi 'Prophet' Austin Liabunya Renews Robert Mugabe Will Die Prophecy," <http://malawianwatchdog.com/2016/01/14/malawi-prophet-austin-liabunya-renews-robert-mugabe-will-die-prophecy/>; "Makindiwa, Magaya Prophecy to 'Boost Zimbabwe's Cash, Economy' in 2016," accessed 20 March 2017, <http://www.zimeye.net/makandiwa-magaya-prophecy-to-boost->

zimbabwes-cash-economy-in-2016/; "Recent Prophecy Alerts, by Prophet Dr. David Owuor (Elijah is Here!)," accessed 20 March 2017, <http://www.highwayofholiness.us/recent-prophecy-alerts-by-prophet-dr-david-owuor-elijah-is-here/>.

- ⁹ See "African Prophets & Their 2015 Prophecies that Never Occurred," accessed 20 March 2017, <http://allafrica.com/view/group/main/main/id/00040576.html>.
- ¹⁰ Siegfried H. Horn, *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Dictionary (SDABD)* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1974), s. v. "Prophet." See also, Jiri Moskala, "The Prophetic Voice in the Old Testament," in *The Gift of Prophecy in Scripture and History*, eds. Alberto R. Timm and Dwain N. Esmond (Silver Spring, MD: Review and Herald, 2015), 15.
- ¹¹ Walter C. Kaiser, Jr, "Prophet, Prophetess, Prophecy," *Baker's Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, ed. Walter A. Elwell (Grand Rapids, MI, Baker Books, 1996), accessed 18 July 2016, <http://www.biblestudytools.com/dictionaries/bakers-evangelical-dictionary/prophet-prophetess-prophecy.html>.
- ¹² Ekkehardt Mueller, "The Prophetic Voice in the New Testament," in *The Gift of Prophecy in Scripture and History*, eds. Timm and Esmond, 45.
- ¹³ Gorge Fohrer, *History of Israelite Religion* (London: SPCK, 1072), 224.
- ¹⁴ Ibid.
- ¹⁵ Ibid.
- ¹⁶ Ibid.
- ¹⁷ See also Moskala, 15-27.
- ¹⁸ Mueller, 43-80.
- ¹⁹ Paul in Ephesians 4:11 also identifies prophecy as a gift given to some in the church.
- ²⁰ Augustine Deke, "The Politics of Prophets and Profits in African Christianity," *Journal of Philosophy, Culture and Religion* 12 (2015): 18, accessed 15 June 2016, www.iiste.org/Journals/index.php/JPCR/article/download/26430/27081.
- ²¹ Kaiser, "Prophet, Prophetess, Prophecy."
- ²² Jon Paulien, *The Gift of Prophecy in Scripture*, in *Understanding Ellen White*, ed. Merlin D. Burt (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press, 2015), 18.

- 23 Ibid.
- 24 God also spoke directly to Moses on Mount Sinai (Exod 19:3-24) and to Elijah (1 Kgs 19:9-18).
- 25 By “gift of prophecy,” Deke may be referring to clairvoyance, whereby prophets know the hidden things in people’s hearts.
- 26 Kaiser, “Prophet, Prophetess, Prophecy.”
- 27 Ibid.
- 28 Michael Griffiths, *Serving Grace: Gifts without “ ”* (MARC Europe; OMF Books, 1986), 50, 51.
- 29 Mueller, 73-78. He provides an enlightening discussion on this debate, concluding with what is essentially the Adventist position on the duration of the gift of prophecy.
- 30 Matthew Kustenbauder, “Prophetic Movements: Eastern Africa,” in *New Encyclopedia of Africa 4*, eds. John Middleton and Joseph C. Miller (Detroit, MI: Thomson/Gale, 2008), 261-270, accessed 15 June 2016, <https://dash.harvard.edu/handle/1/5326138>.
- 31 Ibid.
- 32 Ibid.
- 33 Ibid.
- 34 Ibid.
- 35 Ibid.
- 36 Ibid.
- 37 “Prophet Owuor Biography,” accessed 10 July 2016, <http://softkenya.com/kenyans/david-owuor/>.
- 38 Kustenbauder, “Prophetic movements: Western Africa.”
- 39 Ibid.
- 40 Ibid.
- 41 Ibid.
- 42 Ibid.

- 43 Ibid.
- 44 James N. Amanze, "The Role of Prophecy in the Growth and Expansion of the Synagogue Church of All Nations," *Scriptura* 112 (2013:1), 1, accessed 15 June 2016, <http://scriptura.journals.ac.za/pub/article/download/91/95>. Recently, following the truck attack in France, on 14 July 2016, Nigerian T. B. Joshua, one of the highly respected self-acclaimed prophets in Africa, with large following across the continent and beyond, released a video of his church service on 10 July 2016, where he claimed he had prophesied the unfortunate event. See French Attack Prophecy, accessed 17 July 2016, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IEGww\]kFaYs](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IEGww]kFaYs).
- 45 Ibid. Apart from Prophet Joshua, there are many who lay claims to prophetic gifts. Sometimes, statements such as "I prophesy that" punctuate homilies. People also visit some modest prayer houses where some who claim to be led by God see visions and interpretations to dreams are given.
- 46 Emmanuel Martey, "Prophetic Movements in the Congo: The Life and Work of Simon Kimbangu and How His Followers Saw Him," *Journal of African Instituted Church Theology* 2, no. 1, 2006, accessed 17 July 2016, <https://www.scribd.com/document/215781456/The-Life-and-Work-of-SimonKimbangu-pdf>.
- 47 Ibid.
- 48 As a church pastor in Southern Nigeria between 1994 and 1997, I had the ugly experience of encountering a dismissed Adventist pastor from the Eastern part of Nigeria, who had claimed to have the gift of prophecy. He infiltrated one of the churches in my pastorate, leaving behind great confusion and gaining followers, even among leaders of the local church. I later taught a ministerial student who had been a disciple of the self-proclaimed prophet, but had renounced him when he became convinced this man was in error.
- 49 Kaiser, "Prophet, Prophetess, Prophecy."
- 50 Scriptures provide evidence of some who fail in one more aspects of these things. Some examples include Hananiah (Jer 28); Shemaiah (Jer 29:24-32); Elymas (Bar-Jesus) (Acts 13:6-12), and Balaam (2 Pet 2:15-16; cf. Jude 11). Their motivations seem to be popularity and money.
- 51 Deke, "Politics of Prophets and Profits."
- 52 Nyasha Madzokere and Francis Machingura, "True and False Prophets/esses in the Light of Prophets/esses and Wonders in Zimbabwe," *Journal of Critical Southern Studies* 3 (Winter 2015): 53-71, accessed 15 June 2016, <http://jcss.our.dmu.ac.uk/files/2013/03/JCSS-True-and-False-Prophets-Winter-2015.pdf>. These factors are discussed on pages 57-67 of the article.

There are disagreements, even in Zimbabwe, on the validity of these criteria in the lives and ministry of the self-acclaimed prophets.

- ⁵³ See Allan Anderson, "African Initiated Churches of the Spirit and Pneumatology," *Word & World* 23, 2 (Spring 2003), 178-186, accessed 15 June 2016, https://wordandworld.luthersem.edu/content/pdfs/23-2_Holy_Spirit/23-2_Anderson.pdf.
- ⁵⁴ Ibid, 181, 182.
- ⁵⁵ Deke, 18. For a discussion of the use of anointing oil in African Christianity, see Sampson M. Nwaomah, *The Gospel of Wholeness: Biblical Reflections on Anointing, Healing and Prosperity* (Ibadan, Nigeria: Nigeria Positive Press, 2012); and Sampson M. Nwaomah, "Anointing with Oil in African Christianity: An Evaluation of Contemporary Practices," *Journal of Adventist Mission Studies* 5, no. 2 (Fall 2009): 50-64.
- ⁵⁶ This practice is predominant among prophets from the Aladura Tradition in Nigeria; i.e. AICs, which tend towards syncretism.
- ⁵⁷ Deke, 11.
- ⁵⁸ Joseph Quayesi-Amakye, "Ghana's New Prophetism: Antecedents and Some Characteristic Features," *Australasian Pentecostal Studies*, accessed 15 June 2016, <http://aps-journal.com/aps/index.php/APS/article/view/125/122>.
- ⁵⁹ Deke, 11. It is my view that this is also true of some Adventists in Africa.
- ⁶⁰ Ibid., 12.
- ⁶¹ Some years back, a close relative narrated to me how she went to consult a prophetess to find out the sources of her many troubles. She tried to convince me that the prophetess in a nearby community was genuine, because she made use of a Bible, or at least she saw one in her consultation room. Interactions with colleagues have also revealed similar experiences in other parts of Nigeria and even in other parts of the continent.
- ⁶² There are instances where people seek to justify certain positions based on their understanding of some issues as presented by E. G. White.
- ⁶³ Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, vii.
- ⁶⁴ Ellen G. White, *Evangelism*, 256.
- ⁶⁵ See White, *The Great Controversy*, 9, 595; White, *Testimonies for the Church*, 2:605.

- ⁶⁶ Some years ago the Ellen G. White Research Centre at Babcock University in Nigeria embarked upon translating the book *Great Controversy* into a major Nigerian language, spoken in Western Nigeria. Ironically, the one who indicated interest in doing this work was a Protestant minister, whose son was then taking a degree in Theology at Babcock University. Presently, the Ellen G. White Estate Branch Office at the Adventist University of Africa publishes a Kiswahili version of *The Highlights*, the Office newsletter.